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Development of an Active Follow-up Process in a Stand-alone Medication Therapy Management (MTM) Clinic

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Abstract

Without following-up with patients, one cannot determine the outcomes of interventions made with patients. To ensure follow-up was occurring in a stand-alone MTM clinic, a process for active follow-up and an easy-to-use way to trigger and document follow-up was developed.

Background

The University of Minnesota Duluth (UMD) Medication Therapy Management (MTM) Clinic is a “stand-alone” MTM clinic located on the University of Minnesota, Duluth campus primarily serving University of Minnesota employees and their dependents enrolled in the University’s UPlan health insurance benefit. The UMD MTM Clinic is external to the local medical care facilities and health care providers.

The primary process for follow-up in 2009 was the patient and practitioner would decide on an approximate follow-up visit date, and the patient would fill out their address on a reminder card (like a dentist, veterinarian, or oil change business sends). The card would get filed in a box under the designated follow-up month, and the practitioner or a Pharm.D. student on Advanced Pharmacy Practice Experience (APPE) rotation would mail out the cards as the dates arrived¹. There was not consistent documentation that the follow-up card had been sent to the patient, nor was there a mechanism to trigger another communication to the patient if the patient never responded to the one follow-up card sent

(i.e. if the card did not trigger the patient to schedule a follow-up appointment). It became clear that many patients were “falling between the cracks” for follow-up.

Statement of the problem

There was not a process to ensure follow-up with patients regarding outcomes of MTM interventions, so a process needed to be created.

Purpose of this article

Describe the mechanism developed for ensuring patients were not lost to follow-up in a stand-alone MTM clinic.

Improving the process take 1

To remedy this initially, APPE students started updating a spreadsheet indicating when a card was sent to a patient, and then the student verified weekly if the patient had scheduled a follow-up. The students would send monthly follow-up cards three times, and then call the patient if there was no response. This method proved very tedious and time-consuming. Anecdotally, it seemed patients preferred receiving the cards and calling in on their own time, rather than being “put on the spot” with a phone call to schedule follow-up. Additionally, several patients expressed that they appreciated the multiple follow-up cards, as it was not that they did not *want* to follow-up, but rather, they were busy, and if nothing acute was going on, scheduling follow-up may not have been the priority of the day. They would say things

¹Occasionally a patient would actually schedule the next appointment prior to leaving the visit. In that case, the follow-up card served as a mailed reminder of the upcoming appointment. However, these also fell through the cracks if the patient canceled his or her scheduled appointment in the interim.

like “it was sitting on my desk,” or “it was on my bulletin board, and I finally got around to calling.”

To improve the process further, the following steps were taken.

Improving the process take 2

Rather than documenting these follow-up contacts in a separate system, it made sense to use the electronic documentation system already used to document patient care, which was the AssuranceTM system [Medication Management Systems, Inc. Eden Prairie, MN – www.medsmanagement.com].

First, keeping in mind that “if you don’t document, it didn’t happen,” an AssuranceTM account manager developed a way to document “sent card” as contact type within the software system, so each time a card was sent, this could be documented and easily tracked. Figure 1.

Next, it became evident that the easiest way to trigger a follow-up card to be sent on a certain date was to use the appointment scheduling functionality to set up a “dummy appointment” that would trigger to send a follow-up card in the “To Do” list. However, a way to easily determine which “appointments” were actual appointments scheduled for patients, and which were “dummy appointment” triggers to send follow-up cards needed to be created.

By assigning a *practitioner* and *time* to the appointment date, “real” appointments could be distinguished from follow-up trigger “dummy” appointments. Additionally, the following two “appointment synopsis” phrases were created to easily identify a follow-up trigger: “SEND REMINDER--APPT NOT YET SCHEDULED” or “SEND REMINDER - HAS APPOINTMENT SCHEDULED.” Figures 2 & 3. Customized free text can be typed in appointment synopsis, which allows flexibility for a follow-up appointment, e-mail contact, phone contact, etc. to be designated based on patient preference.

Now when a follow-up reminder card is sent, it is documented AND a new trigger “appointment” is manually scheduled a month out. This occurs monthly for three months. After that, the cards are sent out every two to three months with an additional label added to the card that says “Please call to schedule your follow-up appointment for MTM. If you no longer wish to participate in the program, or receive follow-up communication, please let us know.”

If a patient is not heard from in a year, and they are unresponsive to a final phone call, they are inactivated in the system so they will not be sent further communications.

They can be re-activated if they do decide to follow-up in the future.

Comparing this process to another MTM Practitioner group using the same software

Prior to submitting this article for publication, a pharmacist from PHARM*assist Services PLLC (<http://pharmassistservices.net/>) who uses a similar active follow-up process was consulted. In contrast to the University employee population served by the UMD MTM Clinic, PHARM*assist practitioners serve Medicaid and Medicare patients. They have found phone communication for follow-up to be more effective than mailings in this population.

Future ideas to further improve the process

An idea for the future is to have this process more streamlined within the functionality of the software. For example, upon completion of visit documentation, one would be *required* by the documentation system to create a follow-up appointment or trigger before he/she could close out of the patient record. When that trigger came up in the appointment list, and a “Sent Card” was documented, it would again prompt the next appointment or trigger to be scheduled before one could close out of the patient record. On a larger scale, automatic postcard or letter printing, perhaps weekly, for large-volume practices may be an efficient and effective way to remind patients to schedule follow-up.

Is this process improving follow-up?

Since there was no measurement pre-post active follow-up intervention, it is not known whether this process has improved follow-up. Interestingly, the UMD MTM Clinic practitioners account for 26% of the overall billed UPlan MTM Claims, though only care for 14.4% of the UPlan members enrolled in the MTM program. Table 1 outlines the percent of enrolled patients and percent of total claims from each MTM practice site in the UPlan network. From this, one can see the rate of follow-up at the UMD MTM Clinic exceeds all other practice sites in the network.

Future research

It would have been informative to measure adherence to follow-up recommendations prior and after setting up the process for follow-up in the UMD MTM Clinic, and would highly recommend this to anyone planning to create a new process for follow-up. It would also be informative to measure health outcomes (e.g. blood pressure control, A1C, etc.) pre-post follow-up process intervention or between two groups in a prospective design with a control group. It would also be interesting to explore the medium for communication

to which the specific population served best responds (mail, phone, e-mail, etc.), and to compare a stand-alone MTM practice with one embedded in a primary care clinic environment.

"If you don't follow-up, you don't care." ~Robert J. Cipolle

Would add to Bob's statement "if you don't follow-up, you don't care, *AND you have no idea what the outcomes are.*"

Figure 1. Tracking of reminder cards sent in Assurance™

ASSURANCE Pharmaceutical Care System (H:\Program Files\PCARE_DL - v6.8.99)

File Edit Window Reports Actions Utilities Help ---> Printer: HP LaserJet 4200/4300 PCL6 (from JENNY-TOSH) in session 112 Test

Creating new Evaluation...

aaa aaa - 52 years 01/01/1960 - Male

Select contact type

BLUE = Not Closed

Date	Pharmacist	Type
09/19/2012	Hager, Keri	SC
03/23/2011	Management System	A
12/01/2010	Hager, Keri	A

Tracking of contact types by date

Payer: Private Pay / Private Pay
Policy:
Group:
Edit Insurance Information

Physician Comment Text

Black MS Sans Serif 10 B I U V C A ABC Create Dot Key

☐ Patient Text
 ☒ Physician Text
 ☐ Int/Out Text

Run Triggers
 Attach Reports
 Refresh
 Edit
 New
 Save
 Save / Exit
 Cancel
 Appt
 Close Encounter

Figure 2. "To Do's" of patient appointments and triggers for follow-up

ALL To Do's

Quick Search Clear Quick

Patients for Patient Group Patients for Pharmacy Appts for User

<All Groups> <All Pharmacies> <All Users>

Date	Day	Time	Mins	Patient	DOB	User	Progress	Eligibility	Type	Text	Note
05/15/2012	Tue	11:00 AM	30	Patient_1956, Mary	07/25/1955	KHAGER			Appt	Follow Up Appointment	YES
07/02/2012	Mon	10:45 AM	30	Gordon, Jenny S	03/27/1972	KHAGER			Appt	Follow Up Appointment	
09/11/2012	Tue	08:30 AM	45	Patient_1099, John	08/15/1956	KHAGER			Appt	Follow Up Appointment	
09/11/2012	Tue	09:00 AM	60	Patient4, Mary	04/28/1941	KHAGER			Appt	Follow up	
09/11/2012	Tue	09:30 AM	60	Mills, Michelle Q	01/11/1977	KHAGER			Appt	Follow up Encounter	
09/11/2012	Tue	10:15 AM	15	Anderson, Bob	01/15/1951	KHAGER			Appt	Follow Up Appointment	YES
09/11/2012	Tue	11:30 AM	30	Patient_706, Mary	08/17/1963	KHAGER			Appt	NEW PATIENT	YES
09/12/2012	Wed	11:00 AM	45	Patient_1008, Mary	10/11/1939	KHAGER			Appt	Follow Up Appointment	YES
09/13/2012	Thu	09:15 AM	75	Patient_66, Mary	06/04/1931	KHAGER			Appt	Follow Up Appointment	
09/13/2012	Thu	10:00 AM	30	Patient_66, Mary	06/04/1931	KHAGER			Appt	NEW PATIENT	YES
09/13/2012	Thu	10:45 AM	30	Patient_66, Mary	06/04/1931	KHAGER			Appt	Follow Up Appointment	
09/13/2012	Thu	02:00 PM	30	Patient_132, Mary	06/18/1934	KHAGER			Appt	Follow Up Appointment	
09/13/2012	Thu	02:30 PM	30	Patient_1939, John	08/07/1952	KHAGER			Appt	cmr	
09/18/2012	Tue	12:00 PM	60	Patient_117, Mary	10/29/1947	KHAGER			Appt	Follow Up Appt	
09/18/2012	Tue	12:00 PM	60	Patient_66, Mary	06/04/1931	TECH			Appt	follow up	
09/19/2012	Wed	10:00 AM	30	Mills, Michelle Q	01/11/1977	KHAGER			Appt	Follow Up	
09/19/2012	Wed	12:00 PM	15	Mills, Michelle Q	01/11/1977	KHAGER			Appt	Follow-Up	YES
09/20/2012	Thu	02:15 PM	15	Cipolle, Bob	01/15/1945	TECH			Appt	SEND REMINDER - APPT NOT Y	YES
09/25/2012	Tue			Patient_100, Mary	11/06/1929	TECH			Appt	SEND REMINDER - APPT NOT Y	
09/25/2012	Tue			Patient_1912, Mary	07/28/1963	TECH			Appt	SEND REMINDER - HAS APPOIN	
09/25/2012	Tue	12:00 PM	60	Patient_100, Mary	11/06/1929	KHAGER			Appt	NEW PATIENT	
09/27/2012	Thu		60	Patient_100, Mary	11/06/1929	KHAGER			Appt	SEND REMINDER - HAS APPOIN	
09/27/2012	Thu		60	Patient_1142, Mary	09/03/1946	TECH			Appt	SEND REMINDER - APPT NOT Y	
09/27/2012	Thu			Patient_143, John	07/20/1957	KHAGER			Appt	Follow Up Appointment	
09/27/2012	Thu			Patient_212, Mary	01/08/1935	KHAGER			Appt	SEND REMINDER - APPT NOT Y	
09/27/2012	Thu			Patient_549, John	03/08/1957	TECH			Appt	SEND REMINDER - HAS APPOIN	
10/02/2012	Tue			Anderson, Bob	01/15/1951	TECH			Appt	SEND REMINDER - HAS APPOIN	
10/02/2012	Tue			count, test	01/01/1921	TECH			Appt	SEND REMINDER - HAS APPOIN	

Actual appointments include time and explain type of appointment.

Trigger "dummy" appointments are indicated by "SEND REMINDER"

Patient: Michelle Mills
Address: 100 Anywhere Street, Minneapolis MN 55414
Phone: (952) 746-8185
Pharmacy: Medication Management Systems
Payer: Private Pay / Part D Plan
Physician: William Beckett
Groups:

Save Widths Load Widths

Appt Note Close

Today's Appointments

Followup Reschedule Single

ALL To Do's

Search Clear

Print Preview Export

Patient Lists ... Load Save Clear

Figure 3. Appointment scheduling form where the “appointment synopsis” can be selected (e.g. “CMR,” or “f/u” or “SEND REMINDER”)

Appointment Scheduling Form

Mary Patient_1956 - 57 years 07/25/1955 - Female - (111)-222-3333 - 22873435*01

Scheduled	Day	Progress
05/15/2012	Tue	

Click on [?] to select the “appointment synopsis,” which includes an option for “SEND REMINDER” to set up the trigger

Scheduled Date: 05/15/2012 ?
 Scheduled Time: 11:00 AM ?
 Minutes Needed: 30
 Tuesday (1:30pm, 3p, 9a...) (Created by User SWEGNER)

Appointment Type: Appt
 Progress:

Assigned to User: Bardal, Priya ? View User Schedule to Select Date/Time

☒ Appointment is Active

Appointment Synopsis: CMR ?

Appointment Note: Please call memeber at PH 484-347-0801
 may want to call to check in with pt. member was supposed to have cmr on friday 4.1 but was going through some medication changes and wanted to wait until she knew what she was going to be on. Said she would call back.

Hide Detail Copy to New Search Clear Delete Undo New Save Close Cancel

Table 1. Percent of total claims and % of total enrolled “patients” among UPlan network MTM providers

	UMD MTM	Site A	Site B	Site C	Site D	Site E	Site F	
2009	168	82	147	265	54	9	32	
2010	144	76	190	175	39	2	20	
2011	137	2	121	46	3	7	6	
Total visits	449	160	458	486	96	18	58	1725
% of total claims/visits	26.0%	9.3%	26.6%	28.2%	5.6%	1.0%	3.4%	
Total enrolled pts	129	124	227	284	78	15	37	894
% of total enrolled patients	14.4%	13.9%	25.4%	31.8%	8.7%	1.7%	4.1%	